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Riverside Educational Monographs

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THE IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

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CONTENTS

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION	v
I. THE PROBLEM	i
II. MORE MONEY	16
III. BETTER ORGANIZATION	30
IV. BETTER SUPERVISION	52
OUTLINE	75

MAPS

Forms of Organization, by States	31
Proposed Rearrangement of a Minnesota County	46
Actual Rearrangement of a Florida County .	47
Election and Tenure of County Superintendents	61



EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Our neglect of the rural school

THE rural schools are about to receive from educators the attention that they deserve. The modern industrial city, with its peculiar pathological conditions, has commanded both public and professional interest, but the rural community and the rural school have been neglected. Indeed, in many respects, rural life and rural institutions have lost ground. Relatively speaking, they are not so efficient as they once were.

The rural school and educational progress

It must be apparent to those who have taken the trouble to look closely at the country school that it enjoys no such favor as the ward school of a large city. In neither human nor material equipment does the rural school approximate the resources of a city school. As a rule, the poorly trained teachers are in the country; the best are

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

in the city. The agricultural community is economically poor ; the city is rich in taxable wealth. The country teacher is isolated culturally and professionally; while libraries, museums, theatres, concerts, reading-circles, lectures, and professional meetings are accessible to the city teacher. The rural school-teacher has little chance for help from a superior professional source. Supervision in the country is a formal administrative matter that scarcely takes cognizance of the details of class-room instruction. The cities have supervision, or at least the hope of supervision, for there are supervising principals, supervisors of special subjects, and district superintendents. Thus in more than one respect the rural school has not participated in the fruits of our educational progress.

Disadvantages of the rural school

It must also be admitted that the rural school has been deprived of some of the opportunities for efficiency which once it possessed. Before the growth of cities, the rural school had almost as good a chance to employ the best available

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

teachers as the village or small town school. The opportunity has greatly decreased under modern circumstances. The country school cannot attract the best-trained teachers. It recruits from the least efficiently trained, and it rapidly loses the more capable and brilliant teachers, who are promoted first to the village schools, then to town schools, and finally to the great city system where pay, tenure, pensions, and the graded school attract them. Thus the rural school-teachers of to-day are as a whole the least experienced and the least competent of the teaching body.

Once the rural school had a farm-owning clientage with a neighborhood interest in the school. Now, in many sections, the taxable population has moved to the town, leaving the children of a more or less foreign tenantry to be educated in the country school. In consequence it takes more effort to create an interest in the school than formerly. The taxable landholders, with a vital family interest in the school, are not there in such large proportion, and the foreign tenant, less enthusiastic about American institu-

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

tions, is not so eager nor so intelligent in stating his demands for the children.

The need for fundamental changes in rural school administration

It is the business of the educational and the public leaders, whose vision is wide enough to encompass our national welfare, to turn their attention to the improvement of the rural school. The country population has a right to hold its old advantages ; it should also have the privilege of participating in the fruits of our progress.

No amount of mere preaching to rural school-teachers will make the country schools sufficiently better. The situation requires economic advantages and social pressure to produce results. Our experience shows that country life and institutions have been modified by far-reaching conditions, — economic, social, political, legislative, and administrative. They must be recreated by the use of the same large forces. If wealth has gone to the cities, at least a small part of their riches must be returned for the education of country youth. This means the abro-

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

gation of the antiquated principle that schools must be supported by local funds. Expenditure for the education of a boy differs materially from that used for building roads or for maintaining sanitary systems, or for supplying police and fire protection. Road construction, fire protection, and other similar activities are after all more or less local, but the efficiency of a boy has a potential significance for the country at large. Tomorrow he may become a citizen of a town or a city, or of another rural community. Even if he stays at home, he and others like him will be as much the moulders of our national life as an equal number of people in a distant city. The training of country girls and boys is not a local problem; it is a responsibility of the whole state.

The reconstruction of legislative and administrative conditions, which are basic in rural school improvement, is not a simple task. Any policy of reconstruction is simpler and wiser, however, when it is based upon a careful analysis of educational experience. It is because Professor Cubberley has carefully investigated the conditions

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

underlying the efficiency of rural schools that he has been asked to discuss in this Monograph the measures necessary to effect an adequate improvement in the country school.

THE IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

I

THE PROBLEM

THE past decade has been an especially fruitful one in the field of public education. New interest has been awakened, additional support has been provided, many new forms of educational effort have been undertaken, and everywhere questioning and criticism have taken the place of an earlier contentment with existing conditions. Notable advances have been made or begun in many directions. The high school is being reconstructed, and greatly enriched and expanded. The upper grades of the grammar school, long almost stagnant, are being vitalized and are taking on new life. Domestic, industrial, and vocational training are being introduced very rapidly, and in many parts of the country. Mass instruction is giving place to the instruction of

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

individuals, and the health of school-children is to-day receiving an attention previously unknown.

The country school has not been omitted in this process of reconstruction and criticism, and probably no part of our school system has received more thought and attention during the past decade than has the problem of how to improve the rural school. Probably, also, no part has shown so little improvement. Hundreds of articles have been written, addresses made, and reports printed on this subject. State superintendents of public instruction, county superintendents, normal school presidents, professors of education, and institute lecturers have considered the question, and have proposed ways and means looking to a solution of the problem or problems. Many committees have been appointed to consider the matter. A few citizens, interested in an improvement of rural education, have also taken part in the discussion. Many improvements have been suggested and some have been made, and still the problem remains before us, as yet in large part unsolved.

THE PROBLEM

For a time it was thought by many that an improvement in the quality of the teacher was the key to the problem, and efforts were concentrated on the preparation of a better type of teacher for the schools. This certainly was needed, and there is still much room for further improvement along this line. Teachers' institutes, reading-circles, and summer sessions of normal schools and colleges have rendered valuable services to the rank and file of the teaching body, and have done much to give to new teachers a professional point of view. For the training of new teachers for the rural schools a number of normal schools have, within the past decade, organized rural teachers' training classes, provided a rural observation and practice school, and have offered special courses preparing directly for teaching in the rural schools. In a few states further efforts have been made looking to the preparation of at least a partially trained body of teachers for the rural schools, by the organization of county training-schools, in connection with the high schools. These give a one-year professional course, intended primarily

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

to prepare for rural school work, and state aid has been offered usually to such schools. A very few states have gone even farther and have ordered that all teachers, after a designated date, must have had some kind of professional training. To provide this a number of institutions within the state have been designated to act as state training-schools, and to offer twelve-weeks' summer courses to prospective teachers. These courses have usually been specified somewhat in detail by the state, and have been intended primarily to prepare teachers better for work in the country schools. The net result of all these efforts has been an undoubted improvement in the mental equipment and the teaching capacity of the teachers in our rural and village schools. The rural school problem, though, still confronts us, and we see clearly that an improvement of teachers alone can never solve the problem. It does not touch it deep enough down.

The next thought was to improve the instruction by modifying and enriching it, and by adjusting it more fully to the needs of country life. This was a fruitful idea. During the late

THE PROBLEM

nineties, a form of generalized nature study was introduced into many rural schools. An attempt has since been made to transform this into instruction in agriculture. Economic needs have greatly stimulated this movement, and no addition to our elementary school system has ever been adopted with the rapidity or the enthusiasm which has been witnessed in the case of agriculture. State and county courses of study have required such instruction to be given, state laws have added the subject to the list of examination subjects for teachers' certificates, and many normal schools have added courses in it to their curriculum. The general introduction of the subject has been so rapid that both normal schools and teachers have found themselves unprepared to give the instruction. The net result, however, has been to awaken a new interest in the rural school, and to reveal more clearly the need of a further reorganization of it.

Manual training, domestic science, and household arts have also been seen to have real value in the education of country boys and girls, but the problem of how to introduce this new in-

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

struction is still in large part unsolved. In most cases the mere recognition of the need and the value of such instruction has only served to reveal more clearly the utter inadequacy of the present rural school organization to cope successfully with constructive problems. Something has been accomplished, of course, but nothing of what might have been done under a better form of organization and management.

Recently attempts have been made to improve the trustee, feeling that perhaps the source of the trouble lay there. In some states a trustees' day has been set apart in connection with the county teachers' institute, and, in a number of others, within the past four or five years, annual county conventions of school trustees have been provided for. Under the latter plan, one trustee at least from each board is expected to attend, usually a one-day session, and he is paid his expenses and a small *per diem* allowance for attendance. Questions of school management and finance are considered, the aim being to get the trustees present to see and to provide for some of those common needs of the

THE PROBLEM

rural school that, to the county superintendent, are almost self-evident. No doubt much is learned by the trustees present, and the net result probably will be a slow improvement in rural school conditions. But the method is a slow one, and the trustees change about as fast as they are educated.

One of the most serious obstacles to educational progress in the rural schools is presented by these hundreds of school trustees, who, as a rule, know little about educational needs or progress. As a body they are exceedingly conservative, and hard to educate; they usually possess important powers; and, because they control the purse-strings, they frequently assume an authority unwarranted by their knowledge of school work. Whatever is gained through school trustees' conventions is of course a direct gain, but it is a tonic rather than a cure, and no great or rapid progress in rural education, organization, or management can be expected from this source. The problem of the improvement of the rural schools is altogether too deep-rooted a problem to be solved by any such superficial remedy.

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

Something has been done to improve the schools, too, through legislative limitations. In most of the states the old district meeting, once so common, so powerful, and a source of so much ill feeling, has been reduced in functions until an annual school election is about all that is left of it. The power of the district meeting to designate the teacher has gone, and the power of the district trustees to employ almost any kind of teacher at low wages is fast disappearing. Taxation has been changed from a permissive to a mandatory basis, and minimum limits have been specified. The length of term has been increased from three or four to seven or eight months, and districts have been required to meet these conditions. Grading has commonly been insisted upon, and new subjects of instruction have been designated for all schools by general law. The power of the trustees to build any kind of schoolhouse they choose has been taken from them, by laws requiring the approval of plans by the county or state superintendent. In a few of the states, the power to order repairs or to condemn schoolhouses has also been given to these same

THE PROBLEM

school authorities, or to boards of health. The expenditure of funds has been placed under township or county supervision, and limitations in expenses and in the use of funds have been imposed by general law. Permission to introduce high-school subjects, or to abandon the school and transport the pupils, has been granted to the districts, and sometimes used.

All of these limitations of district authority, and each extension of the authority of the county and of the state, have been in the direction of securing more efficient schools for the children in the rural districts and small villages of the state. Some real improvement has resulted from each assertion of the right and the duty of the state, and from each substitution of a larger and a higher authority for that of the district. It is possible to make still further progress along these lines, as will be pointed out later on.

All these expedients, though, have not made progress as fast as conditions have changed, and the rural and small village schools, although undoubtedly better than they were a generation ago, are probably still further behind the average

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

city school than they were thirty or forty years ago. In any case our rural schools are much poorer and much less effective than they ought to be. Under a better form of organization and management it is possible to make good schools in the country and in villages, as well as in towns and cities, but the changes needed are far more fundamental than are usually proposed.

One mistake that has been made in dealing with the rural school problem is the assumption that it is a problem by itself, instead of being but a part of a much larger problem affecting the conditions of rural and village life. The old conditions which gave rise to the district system, and at one time made the district school and the district meeting such important factors in our national life, have in large part passed away. The same is true of the country church and the country store. The isolation, limited outlook, and restricted markets of the past have given way to larger points of view and to new trade conditions. The telephone, good roads, and frequent and easy means of transportation have put an end to the earlier isolation. Newspapers,

THE PROBLEM

magazines, cheap books, and new political activity have given country people new points of view. The rise of the city as a jobbing centre has opened up new markets, both for sale and for purchase, and has greatly changed the former somewhat even distribution of wealth. The recent improvements in agricultural knowledge have tended to an increase in the size of farms, and, near the large cities, to the leasing of the farms to tenants of large means, who work them in a scientific manner and by means of cheap foreign labor. In many other places the owners move to the towns and cities to enjoy their educational and social advantages, leasing their farms to recent immigrants or to less successful natives. The effect of all these changes is seen in the loss of population in the country districts, in the dying-out of the rural and village churches, in the closing-up of the cross-roads and village general stores, and in the stagnation of the country school. The problem is one of a change in the needs and conditions of all rural life, and the school problem is tied up with the other rural problems.

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

In a few of the more progressive and enlightened communities some marked improvement has been made by means of the consolidation of small schools, and the transportation of pupils to a central school, but the movement, considering the United States as a whole, has as yet made far less progress than its merit warrants. The chief reason for this is that the movement must be initiated and carried through by the votes of the rural residents themselves. This makes it very difficult of accomplishment, because, as a class, farmers and residents of little villages are extremely conservative, unprogressive, jealous, penny-wise, and lacking in any proper conception of the value of good educational conditions. Any progressive proposal is usually met by determined and often unreasoning opposition, and progress by the consent of the voters is a slow and arduous undertaking. Matters involving the fate of nations are often settled more easily than are proposals for an improvement of the rural schools.

The result is that, after almost two decades of agitation, the rural and small-town schools stand

THE PROBLEM

about where they were at the beginning of the agitation for improvement, except in certain areas in a few favored states. The teacher is a little better, and the course of instruction contains a little more that is really worth while, but the school still lacks in almost all of the elements that go to make it a strong educational factor in the lives of country children, or a strong social influence in the lives of country people. The country school lacks interest and ideas; it suffers from isolation and from lack of that enthusiasm which comes only from numbers; and it realizes but a small percentage of its possible efficiency. Its site is usually unattractive; its building is too often a miserable, unsanitary box; it too often lacks the necessary equipment for proper instruction; its instruction is usually limited to the barest elements of an education, and lacks vocational purpose; its teacher is often poorly trained or entirely untrained, and is poorly paid; the supervision provided is utterly inadequate, and usually exists only in name; and the management of the school is often of a very inferior type. The enrollment is usually small, the

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

attendance is irregular, and the conduct of the school poor. The children, coming from the same little area, and often from related families, bring no new interests to the school. Compared with a good town or city school the country school is poor, often miserably poor, and the numerous classes, overburdened programme, absence of equipment, and lack of ideas and impulses to action offer odds against which the best of teachers can make but little headway. As soon, too, as a school grows sufficiently to make it possible to employ two teachers and to grade the school, the desire to "have a school close to home" leads to the subdivision of the district, and to the creation of two small struggling schools.

Within the past decade the bad results of maintaining such schools, where they can be avoided, has become apparent with new force. The past ten to fifteen years have seen a marked change in the conception of the school itself. The old information conception, with a curriculum limited closely to the old staple common-school subjects, is giving place to a new social, vocational, and economic conception of the

THE PROBLEM

school. It is slowly becoming evident that the rural and small-town schools must adapt themselves to the needs of rural and small-town life if they are to be of real service to their people. The school must evolve into a kind of social centre for the community life if it is to reach its greatest effectiveness, and the teaching and the supervision alike should relate themselves much more closely than they now do to the social life and to the betterment of the community as a whole. The school, too, must offer an enriched curriculum and the opportunity for some increased instruction, if it is to meet the needs of the present and of the future.

The absolute inadequacy of the typical rural school to meet these new social needs, and of the typical rural community to see them and to provide for them, are generally evident. The aid must come through a reorganization of rural education, and this, in part, must be superimposed from above. In the judgment of the writer, this reorganization must take place along three lines.

II

MORE MONEY

THE first of these lines of improvement, and an absolute prerequisite in the case of most states, is a very material increase in the funds available for the maintenance of schools, and the increased funds must be secured, in large part, from other than local sources. Merely to pass laws permitting districts to tax themselves at a higher rate will not provide it. In many communities the rate of taxation for schools is already high, often much beyond what is paid in cities and towns for excellent and complete schools. Still further, the need of increased taxation for education is not apparent to most rural communities, and the tendency of rural people to thrift, economy, and close bargaining is not conducive to liberality in matters of taxation.

It ought not to be the policy of the state to make rural communities tax themselves at a high rate for schools. Probably most rural taxpayers

MORE MONEY

now pay more than an average rate for education. The burden is much greater when six to eight taxpayers support a two-hundred-and-fifty-dollar school, than when forty to sixty taxpayers support a thousand-dollar school. The best schools to-day are in the cities, and the premium is already too strong on the side of leaving the farm and going to town for the sake of better educational advantages for one's children.

Sixty years ago we fought out the question in this country, and established the principle that schools were to be free and public, and that the wealth of the state must educate the children of the state. The principle was established in theory, and, in part, in fact, in the shape of general taxation, but in many states the general taxation has not as yet gone very far. In a few states it has remained almost entirely limited to the district, town, or township ; while in others a larger conception has prevailed and general taxation of the wealth of each county is the rule. In each case it is a pooling of effort, though the county taxation unit represents a larger and more liberal conception as to the need for and the proper dis-

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

tribution of the cost of an educational system than does the use of the smaller taxation units. In still other states an even larger and more liberal conception prevails, and general taxation of the wealth of the whole state is the practice, the pooling of effort here taking place on a scale large enough to result in a real equalization of both the burdens and the advantages of education.

The distribution of taxable wealth has changed greatly since the principle of general taxation for public education was first established. Sixty years ago there were few cities of any consequence; the wealth of the country was largely agricultural; the railroads of the country were just beginning to be built, and represented but little taxable property; there were few corporations; the natural resources of the country were almost unworked, and in large part undiscovered; and there were few people who were classed as rich. Wealth and property were still somewhat evenly distributed; undertakings of all kinds were small; and the pooling of effort on any large scale was not necessary.

MORE MONEY

There is need to-day, in most of the states, for a reconsideration of the whole question of taxation for education, and the apportionment of school funds, with a view to a better equalizing of both the burdens and the advantages of education.¹ The social and industrial changes since the middle of the nineteenth century have completely changed the nature of the problem of school support. If the wealth of the state is to educate the children of the state to-day, the burden of support must be pooled to a much larger extent than is now done in most of our states, and state and county taxation for education must replace, to a large degree, the present very unequal local burdens. Good schools generally are impossible under the local taxation system. It can be shown, for almost any state, that there are communities which are showing an actual decrease in per capita wealth, in the face of a rapidly rising cost for education, while other communities are increasing in wealth at a rapid rate. What one community

¹ For a somewhat detailed consideration of this subject see the author's *School Funds and their Apportionment*. (Teachers College Contributions to Education, No. 2. New York, 1906.)

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

can do with ease for its children, another community finds it increasingly difficult or absolutely impossible to do. The main reason why Massachusetts, for example, has some of the best and some of the poorest schools in the United States, is that the state has always made each little town pay its own way. On the contrary, the main reason why California has perhaps, of any state in the Union, the best general average of schools throughout the state, with no oppressive educational burdens on any one, is that the state has pooled the support of education on a broad and intelligent scale, generous state and county taxation having practically abolished taxation for support in the districts.

The location of a railroad, a mine, or a quarry ; the growth of a city with its markets, manufactories, and stores ; the utilization of some natural resource ; the location of a factory or of an industry ; the advantages of a harbor, a navigable river, or a waterfall ; climatic advantages, or a fine bit of natural scenery, developing a tourist resort with big hotels ; good soil, with good easy drainage, as opposed to clay and knobs, — these

MORE MONEY

and many other natural and adventitious advantages tremendously modify to-day the possibilities of maintaining an educational system either wholly or largely by local taxation. One can take a topographic, geologic, and economic map of any state, and mark off the broader areas where good schools may and may not be maintained without material general aid ; areas where population probably always will be sparse ; areas which are certain to support a large and wealthy population ; and areas where the per capita wealth probably always will be small. Yet in all of these communities people live, children grow up in need of education, schools of some kind must be maintained, and future citizens for the state are trained.

It is from state and county taxation, then, rather than from local effort, that the greater part of the necessary funds with which to maintain a good school must, in the future, be derived. From five to six hundred dollars a year is a minimum with which a good school of eight months can be maintained, and this amount, or any large percentage of this amount, is too large to be expected

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

from district taxation. Many districts cannot produce this sum, and short terms, third-grade certificates, poor teachers, and weak schools are the inevitable results of the attempt to make them produce it. It is only by a state- and county-wide pooling of effort, to maintain what is for the common good of all, that good schools can be maintained throughout a state.

The necessary corollary to any system of general taxation for education is a wise system of apportionment. When taxes for education were first collected, in many states they were given back to the communities which paid them. The state acted merely as a tax collector. A great improvement over this method of distribution was made when the plan of apportioning the taxes, and the proceeds of endowment funds, on the basis of the number of children of school age was substituted. At first this change was stoutly resisted, but the reasonableness of taxing people in proportion to their wealth, and of distributing the proceeds of taxation for schools in proportion to the number of children in each community of school age, caused the somewhat general adoption

MORE MONEY

of the plan. This change took place shortly after the middle of the last century, and, at the time, the plan seemed so equitable that more than half of the states fixed it in their constitutions. The plan is still used, in whole or in part, by nearly three fourths of the states.

Although the distribution on school census is an improvement on giving the money back to the districts paying it, or apportioning it on the basis of assessed wealth, it is still, nevertheless, one of the poorest and most unjust of all apportionment bases. Yet the census basis is more extensively used than any other. As a basis of apportionment it is unsatisfactory and unjust, and its general abandonment would be in the interests of justice and good education. The effect of a census apportionment is always to make the greatest reduction in the rate of taxation where the tax rate was the least to begin with, and to leave the inequalities greater than they were before the distribution was made. It always favors the towns and cities, where the per capita wealth is greater, at the expense of the rural districts. Calculated on the basis of enrollment or attendance, a cen-

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

cus basis apportionment is always of greatest advantage in those communities which do the least for their children. Where private or parochial schools exist, it pays communities for the education of children who do not attend the public schools, and for whom the public schools need make no provision. As a basis of apportionment it has no educational significance, in that it does not place a premium on any effort which makes for better educational conditions in a community. Communities are stimulated to get every possible name on the census lists, but there the stimulation ends. If it is worth while for a state to give aid to education at all, then the aid should be given in such a manner, and under such conditions, as will produce the largest educational returns. To stimulate a community to educational activity is much more important than merely decreasing its tax rate, and all aid given should be used as a lever to get as much from the community in return as it is able to give. The census basis of apportionment certainly does not provide for "a general and uniform system of free common schools throughout the state," and no

MORE MONEY

real headway can be made in easing the burdens of school taxation to small and poor communities, and in equalizing the advantages of education, so long as this basis of apportionment is retained.

Enrollment for a definite period, average daily attendance, and aggregate days' attendance are successively better bases for the apportionment of funds, as each places a larger premium on actual presence in the school. The two attendance bases place a premium, in different ways, on every day's attendance at school, and give communities a financial incentive to do their best every day. The aggregate days' attendance basis places a further premium on lengthening the term, instead of closing the school whenever the attendance begins to drop off, or to suit the wishes of the majority. From the standpoint of the state, the boy or girl most worth paying for is the one who wants to go to school for the longest time.

It can be shown by figures, though, that all of these bases, used singly and alone, are unjust to the small school, in that each entirely neglects the unit of actual cost in maintaining a

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

school, — namely, the cost of the teacher. The cost for maintaining a school of ten, twenty, thirty, or forty pupils is the same, — namely, the cost of one teacher. Further, it can be shown by figures that, if only one basis for apportionment is to be used, the most just single basis would be to distribute the money to the cities, towns, and districts on the single basis of the number of teachers actually employed, leaving each community to provide what is needed thereafter by local taxation. The teacher basis, though, while most just to all as a single basis, fails to place a premium on any educational effort, except the employing of a sufficient number of teachers, and hence is defective in this respect.

No single basis for apportionment will give as satisfactory results as a combination of two bases, and the best results, it can be shown, still further,¹ can be obtained from a combination of teachers-actually-employed with aggregate-days'-

¹ These matters have all been worked out statistically in the book previously mentioned, to which the reader is referred for mathematical demonstration of these statements, as well as for more detailed reasons.

MORE MONEY

attendance. Every school, then, regardless of size, receives a unit apportionment for every teacher employed (\$100, \$200, or more. In California it is \$550 for each one-room school), and also a unit apportionment (a certain number of cents per day) for each pupil in actual attendance. With a small reserve fund, as in Indiana and Missouri, to be given to those districts which have raised a certain high rate of local tax and still cannot meet the demands of the state, such a plan of apportionment would come about as near to placing a premium on every desirable effort which communities should be forced to make as any which can be devised. It also, if sufficient general taxation is provided, comes as near to an equalization of educational burdens as it is desirable to do.

It can be shown mathematically that, by a proper rearrangement of state and county apportionment plans, so as to distribute the money with greater reference to both effort and need, it would be possible to increase the school term between one and two months, in a number of the states, with no additions to present funds. By a

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

further reorganization of the school systems of the counties, as proposed in the succeeding chapters, still greater economies could be effected, and a still longer term of school could be maintained.

Adequate financing and intelligent apportionment, then, lie at the basis of any marked improvement of our rural schools. There must be a doubling of funds, in most of the states, if anything approaching satisfactory results is to be obtained. With better-trained teachers in the cities, good supervision, good equipment, good living conditions, practically permanent tenure, and salaries from six hundred to twelve hundred dollars a year, it is not surprising that the marked educational progress of the past quarter of a century has taken place there. The attempt to manage rural schools on a hundred and fifty to two hundred and fifty dollars a year will never give good results, and one of the first necessities is so to increase the funds at hand that there shall never be less than five hundred dollars a year for each teacher employed. This can never be done, generally, by relying wholly, or even

MORE MONEY

largely, upon district taxation ; or by apportioning funds, when raised, on any basis which does not first recognize the teacher as the real unit of cost of the school. In most of our states there is now needed a new campaign for the proper support of the public-school system, with a new presentation of the present need of a greater equalization of both the burdens and the advantages of education. Accompanying this, two other very fundamental reforms are needed, if the best results are to be obtained.

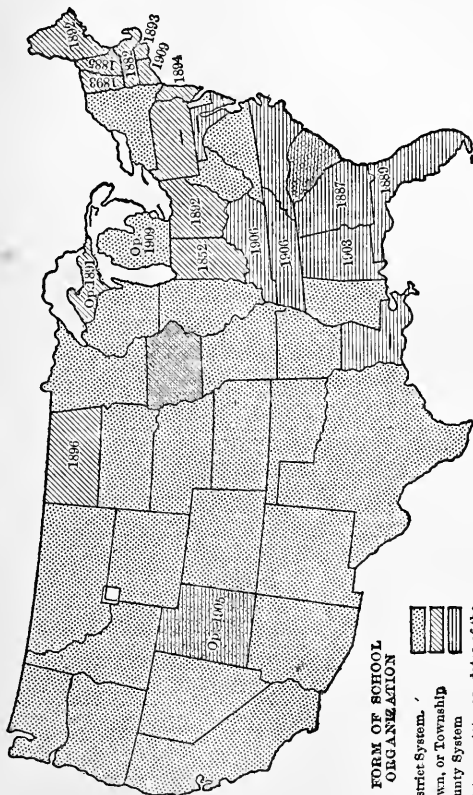
III

BETTER ORGANIZATION

THE second line along which the reorganization of rural education should take place is a reorganization of the whole system of rural school management, to secure a more economical and efficient educational administration.

Three main types of school organization are to be found in the United States, namely, the district, the town or township, and the county. Of these three, the district system is by far the most common, as is seen by a glance at the map on the following page. The dates on certain states are the dates when they abolished the district system.

Under the district system, a small and irregular area known as the school district is the school unit. Each county has from twenty-five to two hundred and fifty such separate and distinct school systems, each with a school board of three trustees or directors, and these are but loosely



FORM OF SCHOOL ORGANIZATION

- District System.
- Town, or Township
- County System

Dates on states are dates of the abolition of the District System, (Iowa, S. Carolina, and Utah are mixed types.)

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

coördinated under a county superintendent as parts of a county and state school system. Under the town or township system, the town or township is the unit, and the schools of the town or township are managed by one central school authority. Under the county system, all of the schools of the county, large cities under separate boards excepted, are managed as a unit by a county board of education, just as all the schools of a city are managed as a unit by a city board of education. Of the three types, the district system is the most objectionable, and the county system has the most to commend it.

The district system originated in Massachusetts in the eighteenth century, and in response to peculiar local needs which no longer exist, and was carried westward in the early nineteenth century by New England people. Being well adapted to primitive conditions, and to schools of meagre scope, the district system no doubt once rendered a useful service. It was best adapted to a time of isolation, limited vision, and to the day of small things and petty interests. As a system of school management it is unadapted

BETTER ORGANIZATION

to the business or the educational needs of the present or of the future; it is inefficient, inconsistent, unintelligent, unprogressive, and expensive; it leads to the multiplication of small and poor schools, and to the building of an unnecessary number of small and cheap schoolhouses, and, when population has increased sufficiently to warrant consolidation, the natural envy, jealousy, and ultra-conservatism of the different districts stand as a block in the road of educational progress. It has been condemned generally by school officials for forty years, and the chief reason for its extensive retention is that the people in many states have never known any other system.

There is no educational or business need for the large number of school officials made necessary by the district system. In Illinois, for example, about forty thousand district trustees (called directors there) and township officers are necessary, by the law, to carry on the rural and the ungraded schools of the state, though only about twelve thousand teachers are employed, less than that number of schools are maintained,

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

and the total cost for maintenance is only about three million dollars a year. This is about one trustee for every seventy-five dollars of school expenditure, while the city of Chicago looks after the educational and business affairs of a complex city school system, employing over six thousand teachers, and costing over eight million dollars a year, with a board of education of twenty-one, and probably could do it still better with a board of seven or nine. Had Chicago continued to retain the district system, that is, a board of three school trustees for each school maintained, which was the plan followed from 1835 to 1857, there would now be required about two hundred and seventy-five different boards of school trustees for the city, and the resulting confusion would be almost inconceivable.

What is true of Illinois is equally true of many other states. Michigan requires about twenty-five thousand trustees, and Detroit eighteen; Missouri about twenty-eight thousand, and St. Louis twelve; and Kentucky, at the time of the abolition of the district system (1906), "had eight thousand three hundred and thirty districts

BETTER ORGANIZATION

and twenty-four thousand nine hundred and ninety school officials, with no unity of purpose and no proper conception of the aim and scope of popular education." Educational progress, under such a system of management, must of necessity be exceedingly slow, and schools under such control cannot be expected to advance at a rate demanded by the changing economic, social, and educational needs.

The argument that these boards of trustees represent closely the wishes of the people reveals the weakness rather than the strength of the system. Country people are, as a rule, ultra-conservative, economical, and sadly lacking in educational progressiveness. New ideas come to them but slowly; what has been for a long time is good enough. No better evidence of this is needed than the stubbornness with which the consolidation movement has been resisted by country people, and the chief progress of the movement has been made in states which have previously abandoned the district system. The schools, if improvement is to be made, must frequently take a position in advance of the people

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

and wait for good results to justify the position, but the ability to do so is frequently impeded by conservative and unintelligent boards of district school trustees. Progress by concurrent action is hard to get; trustees frequently assume authority over matters of which they are relatively ignorant; and nearly all important progress in the improvement of rural schools has been made by first curtailing the power of the district school authorities.

The system is both expensive and inefficient, because it leads to the multiplication of many small and unnecessary schools, and because these schools form no part of a comprehensive scheme of rural school education. In almost any reasonably well-populated county, operating under the district system, a rearrangement of the schools could be made, by competent educational authorities, which would provide much better educational facilities and at the same time dispense with the services of from twenty to sixty teachers.

As it is to-day, each little rural school stands alone, and provides the bare essentials of an education only. It does little to prepare its pupils

BETTER ORGANIZATION

for intelligent participation in rural life, to train them for the vocations of country people, or to offer to them the advantages as well as the essentials of an education, and it cannot provide secondary training for them. Manual training and carpentry, mechanical drawing, domestic science, household economics, millinery, dress-making, nursing, the care of the sick, gardening, and the elements of agriculture, it is practically impossible to teach in the little school of fifteen to thirty children. Not only is there not time for such subjects, but the money usually at hand is not sufficient to buy the services of a teacher competent to offer such instruction. The cities, alive to the value of such instruction, are offering it to their grammar-school children and paying high prices to get teachers who can teach such subjects. But the small country school continues to provide the cheapest form of book education, and to prepare its pupils for city and professional life, rather than for rural and vocational life. This condition will not be greatly different so long as the district system of school control is continued.

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

The rural school, too, ought to lead in an unbroken sequence to a high school, of some kind, for all country children. This it usually does not do to-day. The rural, and even the village district, are too small units to warrant the establishment of a high school, and admission to town and city high schools must be asked for and paid for on a tuition basis. By a proper reorganization of the rural schools it would be possible to provide much better educational advantages in the elementary grades, and high-school privileges for all, at no materially greater cost, and with the use of fewer but better teachers than are at present employed.

Efforts have been made to improve the rural schools by means of laws permitting of the consolidation of schools, by the voluntary vote of the districts concerned, or by action by the town or township authorities. Some marked progress has been made in a few states, but almost without exception they are states which earlier have abandoned the district system. In the district-system states the movement has awakened but comparatively little interest, and in some of the

BETTER ORGANIZATION

district-system states it has been impossible even to get laws permitting of consolidation through the legislature. In other such states the laws have been passed, but almost no use has been made of them.

Yet in the abandonment of the little district school, except for isolated pupils or in sparsely settled areas; in the organization of a well-planned series of consolidated central schools, with connecting high schools; and in the making of these consolidated or central schools centres of a new rural community life, lies, in large part, not only the solution of the rural school problem but the solution of the rural community problem as well. Only in such schools can the kind of education demanded by modern conditions be given, and only at such points can community centres be established which will serve as rallying-points and tend to conserve and unify country life. To expect such centres to be organized voluntarily by country people is to expect almost the impossible. To most country people an ocular demonstration is needed to convince them of the value of almost any new proposal.

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

The lack of coördination and coöperation between the districts is one of the most serious obstacles to the consolidation movement. The different boards of school trustees of the forty to two hundred school districts of an average county have no organic connection, and the people they represent are often swayed more by envy and jealousy — personal, political, religious, social, economic — than by all of the educational arguments which can be advanced. A dog-in-the-manger spirit is often in evidence, and jealousy of the proposed concentrating centre is often a strong factor in producing unfavorable action.

Under most existing laws propositions for consolidation must be initiated in the districts, petitioned for, and then submitted to a separate vote in each of the different districts. Consolidation, under such circumstances, is accomplished only with the greatest difficulty, and often only after repeated trials, and it frequently results in the union of only the more progressive districts, with the result that the union formed is too small. Consolidated schools formed thus by district ac-

BETTER ORGANIZATION

tion bear little or no relation to one another, and lack the wisdom as to size and location of the school which would come from the adoption first of a comprehensive plan, worked out for the county as a whole.

The town or township unit offers many advantages over the district, but, except in very thickly populated regions, it is too small to admit of the best results. Very often the best arrangement of consolidated school lines, too, will follow topographic features rather than township lines, and again the congressional township area (thirty-six square miles) will also at times prove too large for one school. This is well shown on the Minnesota map, printed on page 46. The county offers a much better unit for almost all kinds of school organization, and the general adoption, outside of New England, of the county as the unit for school purposes would be greatly in the interest of economical and efficient administration. In most other public functions, — assessment and taxation, poor-relief, roads and bridges, sanitation, control of the liquor traffic, the administration of justice, and, in some matters, for schools also,

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

the county is the prevailing unit, and to add the schools to the list would be a good addition.

The central features of a good county plan of school administration are a county board of education, representing the people, with the county superintendent of schools as their executive officer. This board would have supervisory control of all of the schools of the county, cities under city boards of education excepted, and would have power to arrange and rearrange school districts ; to form union schools and consolidated central schools, and to provide transportation ; to provide high schools for all ; to employ, fix the salaries of, and pay all teachers and employees ; often to adopt the course of study, add other branches, and designate textbooks ; to enforce the compulsory attendance laws ; to determine, within fixed limits, the county school taxes ; and to exercise a general supervision over the schools of the county, analogous to that exercised over the schools of a city by a city board of education. The schools of the county are thus managed as a unit ; school taxes and school privileges are equalized all over the county ; good, well-taught

BETTER ORGANIZATION

elementary schools, with a rich curriculum and maintained for a uniformly long term, are provided at each central school; all districts are parts of organized high-school territory, and hence high-school advantages are provided free to all; and county attendance officers, with a county parental school, carefully enforce the compulsory attendance laws.

A local school officer or officers (trustees) would still exist for each single, union, or consolidated district, but the number of such in a county would be greatly reduced, and their powers would be somewhat closely limited. They could well be entrusted with the care of the schoolhouse, providing of fuel and supplies, handling of severe cases of discipline, acting as a means of communication between the people of the district and the county school authorities, and in expressing for the district its preference as to the persons to be employed as teachers. These are legitimate functions to be retained by local school authorities. What would be taken away from them are functions which district authorities are no longer competent to exercise,

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

which they have lost in some states, and which they ought everywhere to lose. Such powers as the classification of the school, adding or reducing the subjects of study, selecting textbooks, examining and supervising the instruction, employing and dismissing teachers and driving bargains with them as to salary, determining tax rates (except by vote of the district for building purposes), handling district funds, keeping district accounts, and incurring expenses, except as authorized, are powers which it will be well for the schools if the present district authorities should lose. These are not functions which the people of each city ward or schoolhouse district think it necessary to be allowed to exercise, and there is little argument, other than three generations of practice, why the people of rural school districts should. All of the powers mentioned above can be handled better by central expert authority, as will be pointed out more in detail in the next chapter.

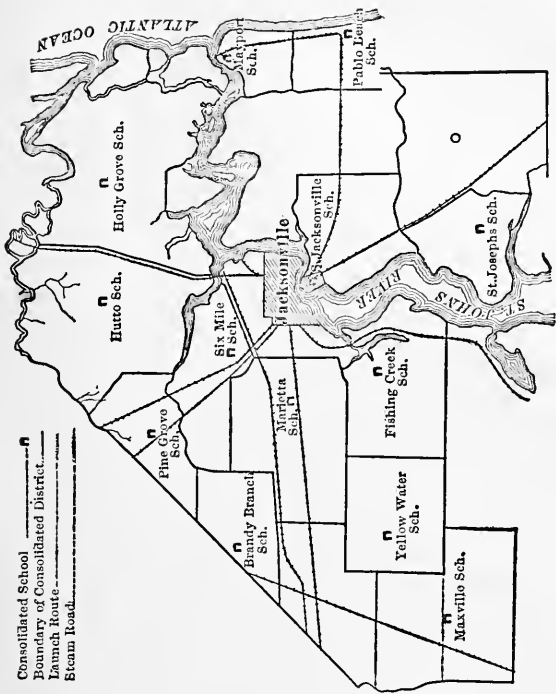
The accompanying illustrations show how such a plan would work out in two counties. The Minnesota drawing is a hypothetical rearrangement,

BETTER ORGANIZATION

the location of all of the little rural schools now existing being shown, as well as the new consolidated schools. On this plan it will be noted that the best rearrangement of lines does not follow the township lines. The Florida drawing is an actual case, the thirteen consolidated schools having replaced all of the little rural schools, except those in one district.¹

What we have, in each of these cases, is the provision of a well-organized system of schools for the county as a whole, with graded schools, a rich and useful curriculum, and high-school advantages for all. The main difference between either and a city school system is that it is spread out a little more, but the advantages which may be offered the country child are practically the same as in the city. Instead of the little, lonely school, with its handful of children, numerous classes, meagre curriculum, over-crowded programme, and lonely, town-sick

¹ An excellent little book on this subject is *Consolidated Rural Schools, and Organization of a County System*, by George W. Knorr. (U. S. Dept. of Agriculture, Experimental Station Bulletin No. 232, 99 pp., illus., 1910.)



MAP, SHOWING CONSOLIDATED DISTRICTS AND LOCATION OF CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL HOUSES, IN DUVAL COUNTY, FLORIDA. (AFTER KNORR.)

Area of county, 884 square miles. Location of future consolidated schools shown by a circle. Two launches are used in transportation, in addition to twenty-eight wagons, all owned by the county.

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

teacher, there is a school graded into from three to eight classrooms, enough pupils to awaken a real interest, an enriched curriculum and special teachers, a principal and a group of teachers less lonesome and less anxious to get to the city to teach, part at least of a high-school course, and a school that will awaken community interest and pride. By building a proper building, as can be done with the larger taxable area to pay for it, a building can be provided which is not only modern, well-heated, and thoroughly sanitary, but one which will contain a library room, a manual training and carpentry room, a domestic science and household arts room, and ground opportunities sufficient for good instruction in agriculture. By adding an assembly hall of sufficient size, with stage, movable seats, piano, and stereopticon, which can be done at but small extra cost, the school could become what every consolidated or central school should become, a permanent educational, intellectual, and social centre for the people of the enlarged school district, a rallying-point for the people of the community, and a strong unifying force in country life. Lectures, entertain-

BETTER ORGANIZATION

ments, public meetings, discussions, debates, exhibitions of school work, local institutes, and social gatherings could then be held at the central school, the same wagons which bring the children to school in the daytime serving to bring their parents at night, or at other times. Traveling and branch libraries may here find a home. The different movements for the socializing of country life and the socializing of the rural school here meet on common ground.

The plan for the reorganization of county and small-village education here outlined really provides for offering to country people practically as good educational advantages as are possessed by city people, at no greater cost, and with the advantage of the country to live in. It means the making-over of the rural schools by incorporating into their curricula the special advantages now possessed by the cities, and into their organization and management the best city administrative experience. To conceive of the plan in its details and to see its advantages requires more imagination than country people usually possess, and, with the change which in many places is

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

taking place in the character of the country people, more than we can expect these new classes to have for some time to come. If the country school is to be revitalized in any such manner and made into a social instrument adapted to present educational and economic needs, it will have to be accomplished largely by the interposition of the state. If we wait for action by those who now apparently seem so satisfied with the district system, we shall wait another generation or two before any marked results are achieved.

There are three main ways of inaugurating the county plan of school organization.

The first way is by a county commission, as in Minnesota. Under this plan, on a petition of one fourth of the electors, the county commissioners appoint a rural school commission of seven, one of whom shall be the county school superintendent. This commission proceeds to redistrict the county, prepares and publishes a map of the same, and an election is called to decide the question. Progress under this plan probably will be slow, and many opportunities are presented for the defeat in the election of any really good plan

BETTER ORGANIZATION

proposed. The second is by an optional adoption by counties, first, of a county plan of school organization, with a representative county board of education, as in Utah, and then afterward proceeding to the organization of the county into consolidated districts, as has been done in Florida. The third plan is to legislate for the state as a whole at once, as was done in Kentucky and Tennessee, create a county board of education to take charge of the schools of the county, reduce the school districts to subdistricts and deprive them of all except legitimate functions, and give to the county board of education power to consolidate schools and to transport children. Maryland, Alabama, and Louisiana offer good types of this form of county school organization. Similar powers are possessed by the town school authorities of the Massachusetts and Connecticut towns.

The exact plan to be followed is less important than the attainment of the result. Efficient rural school organization and control will be promoted in proportion as the central control of the county is substituted for the control by the districts. With county control provided for, one additional reform becomes necessary.

IV

BETTER SUPERVISION

THE third line along which a reorganization of rural education should take place, and a corollary to the second one, is the provision of close, adequate, and professional supervision for the rural schools. The supervision which exists to-day, except in Massachusetts and in a few favored towns and townships elsewhere, exists much more in name than in fact.

It is here that the cities again have a great advantage over the small-village and rural schools. With their superintendents, special supervisors, and supervising principals, the cities look after their instruction with a care and a thoroughness unknown in rural schools. Yet it is in the cities that most of the trained and experienced teachers are found, while in the rural schools nearly all of the untrained and the inexperienced, and most of the poorly educated and comparatively unsuccessful teachers find either their starting-point or

BETTER SUPERVISION

their haven of rest. In the better-managed cities, if trouble arises, or if a teacher proves weak, close attention is at once given to the case, and the teacher either is improved by helpful suggestions or assistance, or is soon removed from the position. In the rural and the village schools, difficult situations are allowed to become aggravated, and poor teaching to become cumulative. Often a whole year in a child's education is wasted, or worse than wasted, because of a poor teacher and the lack of real supervision.

State laws generally require a county superintendent of schools to visit each school in his county at least once each year, and some superintendents try to visit each school twice. This, though no doubt useful, particularly to the superintendent, is of little value as professional supervision. Institutes and examinations make up about all else that there is of a supervisory nature. So large is the office work — legal, financial, statistical, clerical, and political — that a superintendent has little time for anything more. As the work of a county superintendent is at present laid out, from two thirds to four fifths of

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

his time is devoted to other functions than school supervision, and these other functions tend constantly to increase.

The office arose early in the evolution of our state school systems. The chief functions at first were to look after the school lands, to stimulate an interest in education, to gather information, and to make reports as to the establishment of schools. In a few states the superintendent was evolved out of the township superintendent, created early in our development ; in others, out of a school land commissioner ; in others, as an offshoot of some other county office, and by a division of labor ; and, in still other states, the superintendency has evolved out of a board of county commissioners. By the time the newer states west of the Mississippi River were formed, the office had been created so generally as to form a type, which was generally copied.

Everywhere the office, at first, was almost entirely a statistical and clerical one, and this side of the work has been greatly added to by the tendency, manifest in marked degree during the past quarter of a century, to transfer power

BETTER SUPERVISION

and authority from the district school boards to the county and state educational authorities. The office was created to represent the authority of the county and the state, distinct from the district authorities on the one hand, and the teaching body on the other. The analogy to other county officials was evident; election by the people, for short terms, seemed the natural method; and this plan, once begun, still persists in about three fourths of the states having such an officer.

Within recent years, coincident with the evolution of the many new social and educational problems, the expansion of the curriculum, and the development of a professional conception of the work of supervision, new conceptions as to the nature and duties of the office have come to the front. New professional obligations and responsibilities have been added, and insisted upon; new standards of admission to the work have been set up; the demand for some real supervision for the rural schools cannot be much longer resisted; and, generally to-day, there is a feeling that the office must soon be placed

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

upon a professional rather than upon a political basis.

Efforts to solve the problem of adequate supervision for the rural schools have, for a long time, been made along a number of lines. Perhaps the one attempted most has been that of trying to secure deputy superintendents, to assist the county superintendent in the work of supervision, or clerical assistance to enable him to dispense with some of his office work. Excepting in a few large counties, these efforts have so far met with but little success. The county supervisors (or commissioners), it is evident, will not voluntarily provide such deputies or clerks, and the superintendents so far have not been able to prevail upon the legislatures to compel them to do so. The complaints as to needed assistance, with which state school reports abound, and the low salaries paid to the county superintendents all over the United States, give abundant evidence that the office, as it now exists, has not as yet established itself very deeply in the hearts of the people. In almost any county-seat city the superintendent of the

BETTER SUPERVISION

city schools and the principal of the high school are paid from one and a half to three times as much as is the superintendent of the county schools, are better provided with clerical assistance, and either of the two former positions is generally looked upon as much more important, educationally, than is the county office.

Another line along which it has been thought possible to provide supervision for the rural and town schools has been by legislation permitting groups of districts or towns or townships to unite in a union to employ a supervising principal. This is the plan which has been followed by Massachusetts in dealing with its towns. The towns there were first permitted to form such superintendency unions, then they were given state subsidies if they would do so, and finally the recalcitrant towns were forced to unite and to provide proper supervision for their schools. The plan of unions for supervision has been employed also, to a limited extent, in some of the township-unit states, though the township itself has formed the most common supervisory unit. Voluntary unions in district-system states are almost un-

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

known, and it is useless to expect many of them to be formed. The same difficulty is encountered here as in the consolidation movement,—the difficulty of obtaining the consent of so many small, mutually jealous, and penny-wise school-district boards. United action by district authorities is next to impossible, and it is futile to hope that adequate supervision will come from this source.

The solution of the problem of providing adequate and professional supervision for the rural and village schools lies in another direction, and that is in the divorce of the office of county superintendent from politics, in the removal of the office from the elective column, and in the adoption of an efficient system of county school administration. It is useless to expect a very much better quality of county supervision than we have at present so long as we permit the Republican and Democratic parties to select our superintendents, and chiefly on the basis of political affiliation and local residence. Neither can we expect much greater popular support for the office until it ceases to be a closely protected

BETTER SUPERVISION

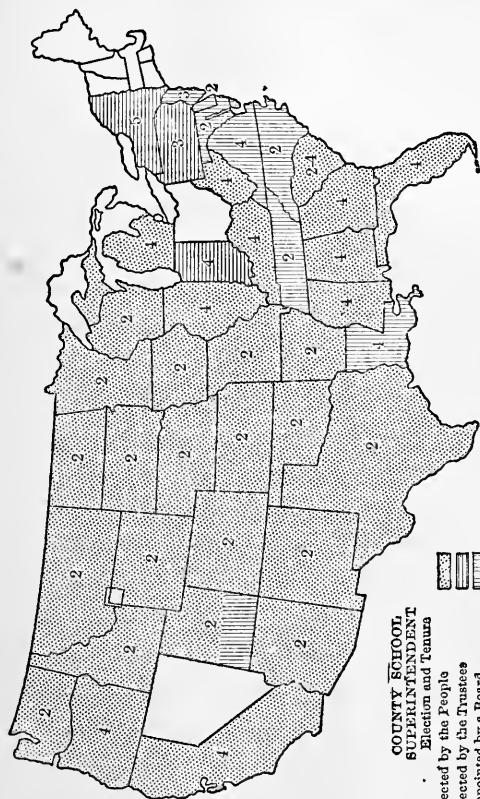
local political industry, and is opened up to the free competition of men and women of good educational preparation and experience.

Once place the office on an educational, instead of a political basis ; make it possible for men or women from the outside to be considered for the office ; make the retention of the office dependent on good service, instead of the party caucus or the popular whim ; place a premium on accomplishment and service, rather than on trying to keep on the good side of the electorate ; and open the office as a possible career for which men and women would be warranted in making careful professional preparation ; and the poor conditions now surrounding the office would rapidly change. Under the same freedom of selection and competition for men as now exists for city superintendents and for high-school principals, the character of the men engaged in county supervision would rapidly improve, competition of counties for men would follow, the salaries offered would soon double or treble, clerical assistance would be easily obtainable, and men and women who now prepare themselves for and go into

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

city or high-school work would turn to county supervision as a useful and influential field of labor.

As it is to-day, the office offers no career to any one, and the real merit of a man frequently has little or nothing to do with either his selection or his retention in office. After a man has learned his work and come to like it, he is altogether too often defeated for renomination or reelection by the enmity of the party bosses, by some slip or trade in the political convention, by some unforeseen accident during the campaign, by the more effective canvass of a "glad-hander" or "gallery-playing" opponent, or by a general party landslide. Too often the superintendent who attends strictly to his business does so at the expense of his political prospects, and the superintendent who does his duty, especially in the states where the district system is still strong, is frequently marked for defeat by the enemies he has made in the districts. The vicious political principle of rotation in office also helps to eliminate good men. After one or two terms in the office a superintendent's career is usually ended, similar



COUNTY SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT

Election and Tenure

Elected by the People

Elected by the Trustees

Appointed by a Board

No County Superintendent

Figures on states mean length of term.

(Utah, both systems; Tennessee by County Court, Delaware, by Governor.)

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

employment elsewhere is impossible, and he commonly leaves school work entirely.

There can be no question but that the short tenure of office, the low salaries, the local residence requirement, the political aspect of the office, the public notoriety attached to candidacy, the long campaign, and, under the new primary election laws, the double campaign, the expense of securing the office, the uncertainty of election, and the humiliation of defeat, together tend to keep the best men in the teaching profession out of the office, with the result that the average county superintendent of to-day, with full allowance for exceptional cases, represents an inferior quality of professional leadership compared with what might be had under more favorable conditions. He is much more frequently a routine worker, a strict constructionist, and a good, conscientious clerk, than a man of insight, imagination, and educational grasp, who works in the light of established principles and sees the ends behind the means.

The fault lies, though, not so much with the men who hold the office as with the system which

BETTER SUPERVISION

produces them. The men we have to-day as county superintendents are, averaged up, perhaps the best the system has so far produced. It is the system itself which is fundamentally wrong. Potentially, the office is one of large possibilities. County supervision ought to attract as capable men as does the city school service, and it ought even to compete with the cities for men. As it is to-day, however, the political and residential tariff leveled against training and competency is practically prohibitive, and county school supervision, in most states, is to a very large degree merely a closely limited local industry, offering only temporary employment to the few who are willing to consider political candidacy.

The disastrous results of the present political system may perhaps be seen best if we imagine the county system applied to the school systems of our towns and cities. Even those county superintendents themselves who loudly espouse the present plan, would not advocate so disastrous a change. We can at once imagine the demoralization which would follow if our city superin-

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

tendents, high-school and grammar-school principals, and town supervising principals were to be selected always from among local residents, by nomination on party tickets, and by popular election. The introduction of such a vicious system would soon ruin the schools and quickly drive the best men out of the work. Yet, if it is right and wise to vote for one, it is right and wise to vote for all ; and if it is wrong and unwise to vote for one, it is wrong and unwise to vote for any one. The positions and the nature of the work stand on a par with one another, and the poor quality of the supervision of our country schools, and in the two cities in the United States which still retain the elective method, stand as abundant evidence that the plan of nomination and election, instead of selection and appointment, is both wrong in principle and against the best interests of education.

It is easy enough to make almost any one recognize the serious limitations under which the office labors to-day, excepting the county superintendents themselves. Hope springs eternal in the politician's breast, and, in possession

BETTER SUPERVISION

of the office, with its political prestige and power, he thinks he can get it again, disregards all evidence and argument, and goes to the legislature and helps to defeat all measures looking toward real improvement of the conditions surrounding the office. The most serious obstacle to the improvement of county school supervision to-day is the county superintendent himself. Many of them befog the issue as much as possible by loud talk about their faith in the judgment of "the toiling fathers on the hillsides," and of the ability of the "people to guard the interests of their homes and schools," and ignore the real question and the far-reaching significance, for country people and country children, of the reforms proposed. A few of the county superintendents see the significance of the proposals, both for the schools and for the superintendents themselves, and do what they can to advance the movement, but they are as yet in a hopeless minority. Most county superintendents can see nothing in the plan, — until some one else gets their office.

The county superintendent, in his evolution, was the real beginning, in most states, of a

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

county as opposed to a township or a district system of school administration. He deals with the county as a whole, and the gradual transference of powers to his office from the district school authorities, tends constantly to build up the county unit at the expense of the district. Under an educational organization closely analogous to that of the cities, the transference of power and authority to his office would be rapid, and an efficient county system of school organization and administration would rapidly evolve. The system of county-unit organization, outlined in the preceding chapter, can never be complete until the county superintendency is changed from a political and elective to an educational and appointive office. The completed plan would then be somewhat as follows :—

The people, preferably at the spring school-election time, would vote for members of a county board of education, to represent them in the management of their schools. These members might be elected by commissioner or supervisor districts, if this were thought desirable, but better representatives and better results would be

BETTER SUPERVISION

obtained, ultimately, if they were elected from the county at large. A board of five is both large and small enough, and it would be well if one member were elected each year, for a five-year term. Three-year terms might be provided, the annual elections being for two, two, and one ; or four-year terms, with three and two elected biennially. This detail is not a vital one, so long as a continuous body is provided for. This gives the people five persons, presumably taxpayers and parents, to represent them, in place of the one county superintendent they now elect. This county board of education thus becomes a body analogous to a city board of education, and should be given similar powers and duties.

The county board of education now takes charge of all the schools of the county, not under separate city boards of education, and manages the schools of the county as a unit, as outlined in the preceding chapter. It appoints the county superintendent of schools, and, on his recommendation, assistant superintendents and special supervisors, as needed, just as city boards of education appoint similar officials. In selecting

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

the county superintendent, his assistants, and the special supervisors, the county board is free to go anywhere for them, within or without the state, so long as the persons selected possess the requisite educational preparation and professional certificates. The board also fixes their salaries, free from any maxima or minima set by law, the object being to enable the boards to compete freely in the educational markets for men and women of training, educational insight, and executive skill. This makes the county the competitor of the city, as well as of other counties, and enables the county to secure the services of the best men obtainable for the money it can pay.

The board also organizes the business, legal, and clerical affairs of the office under a combined clerk and business manager, as is done in the cities, or under an assistant superintendent, who devotes his time to the work, thus freeing the superintendent from the necessity of spending his time in routine office work. The board is to be the sole judge as to the number of assistants, clerks, stenographers, etc., necessary to con-

BETTER SUPERVISION

duct properly the business of the office, and of the salaries to be paid such employees.

After considering such recommendations as the trustees of the different single and consolidated districts care to make, the county superintendent recommends to the county board for approval all the regular and special teachers needed for the schools under its charge, the board fixing their compensation. If no state course of study or state adoption of textbooks is in use in the state, they are to adopt these, on the recommendation of the superintendent and his assistants. The board may make rules and regulations, not inconsistent with law, for the management of the schools under their charge; may, on the recommendation of the superintendent, suspend or dismiss teachers, for cause; may appoint county truant officers, and establish a county parental school; may issue, on the recommendation of the board of superintendents, such teachers' certificates as are authorized by general law; may alter the boundaries of school districts, consolidate schools, and provide transportation; and shall, within the limits fixed by law, deter-

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

mine the annual county school tax, and certify the same to the proper authorities for levy, and this without review by the county commissioners, or supervisors. The board's functions are to be legislative, but not executive.

The number of assistant superintendents, teachers, and supervisors of special subjects to be appointed for the schools of the county may be left to be determined by the board, or may be fixed by general law, but should be enough to teach and supervise properly the schools of the county, and on approximately the same basis as city schools are taught and supervised. The county superintendent should visit all of the schools of his county. His assistants, when the county is large enough to need them, may supervise districts, or certain school grades, as the superintendent or board may direct.

So far as possible, the superintendents and his assistants should identify themselves with the needs and interests of the county, or parts of the county, which they are to supervise. By personal conference, occasional public addresses, articles and news notes in the local papers, the superin-

BETTER SUPERVISION

tending body ought to help to mould and to advance community sentiment with reference to education. In case of need it ought to be possible for a supervisor to spend days at a time in a school, and the visits in any case ought never to be more than a few weeks apart. It should be the particular business of the supervisors to try to make good teachers out of the material at hand; to single out promising ones, and promote them and encourage them to advance in knowledge and training; to guide the schools in organization and management, and to develop the educational system of the county as fast as the people can afford, and as far as is consistent with sound education. From time to time conferences with the teachers should be held as to methods and results. For such work men and women are needed who possess generous personal culture, liberal views, good pedagogical training, satisfactory teaching experience, good common sense, and a knowledge of and sympathy with rural conditions, people, and life. To secure such persons, not only must good salaries be paid, but the conditions surrounding the entrance upon

IMPROVEMENT OF RURAL SCHOOLS

and continuance in such service must be satisfactory.

Combine the three lines of improvement presented in this and the preceding chapters, and we have the main lines along which real improvement of our rural and small-town schools will need to be made. A county unit of organization and administration, with a county school board representing the people; supervision placed on an educational, instead of a political basis, and made effective; the subordination and consolidation of the districts, on the initiative of a central authority, and according to a constructive and unified educational plan; adequate funds for the necessary support of schools, drawn from state and county taxation, with permissive local taxation for buildings and extra educational efforts; and a system of apportionment which recognizes the unit of cost of the school, and which places a premium on efficiency and attendance; these are the main essentials of the plan. It closely resembles the organization found most effective by the cities, and aims to produce a school system in the country as effective in pre-

BETTER SUPERVISION

paring for country life as the city schools are in preparing for city life. There can be little doubt that such a central board, composed of citizens of the intelligence, ability, and personal character necessary to secure election at a time when partisan politics and party tickets do not cloud the judgment, and dealing with the county's educational needs as a whole, would provide much better schools for all than ever will be done by district authority.



OUTLINE

I. THE PROBLEM

1. Recent educational progress	1
2. Interest in the rural school problem	2
3. Improving the teacher	3
4. Enriching the instruction	4
5. Improving the trustee	6
6. Limitations imposed and permissions granted	8
7. The result of these expedients	9
8. The rural problem not an isolated one	10
9. The consolidation movement	12
10. The rural school as it is to-day	12
11. The new social needs	14

II. MORE MONEY

1. The need of greater support	16
2. What was settled sixty years ago	17
3. Changes in distribution which have taken place	18
4. Need of a reconsideration of the question	19
5. Diversity in economic conditions	20
6. Necessity of state and county taxation	21
7. Need of a good apportionment plan	22
8. Disadvantages of the census basis	23
9. Other single apportionment bases	25
10. Need of a combination of bases	25
11. The teacher the unit of cost	26

III. BETTER ORGANIZATION

1. Types of school organization	30
2. The district system	32

OUTLINE

3. School officials required	33
4. Strength and weakness of district control	35
5. District system expensive and inefficient	36
6. Limited curriculum of the rural school	36
7. Lack of connection with the high school	38
8. The consolidation movement	39
9. Difficulties commonly encountered	40
10. The town and the township units	41
11. The county-unit plan	42
12. Powers of local district trustees	43
13. The plan illustrated	44
14. What the consolidated school can provide.	49
15. Three ways of inaugurating the plan	50

IV. BETTER SUPERVISION

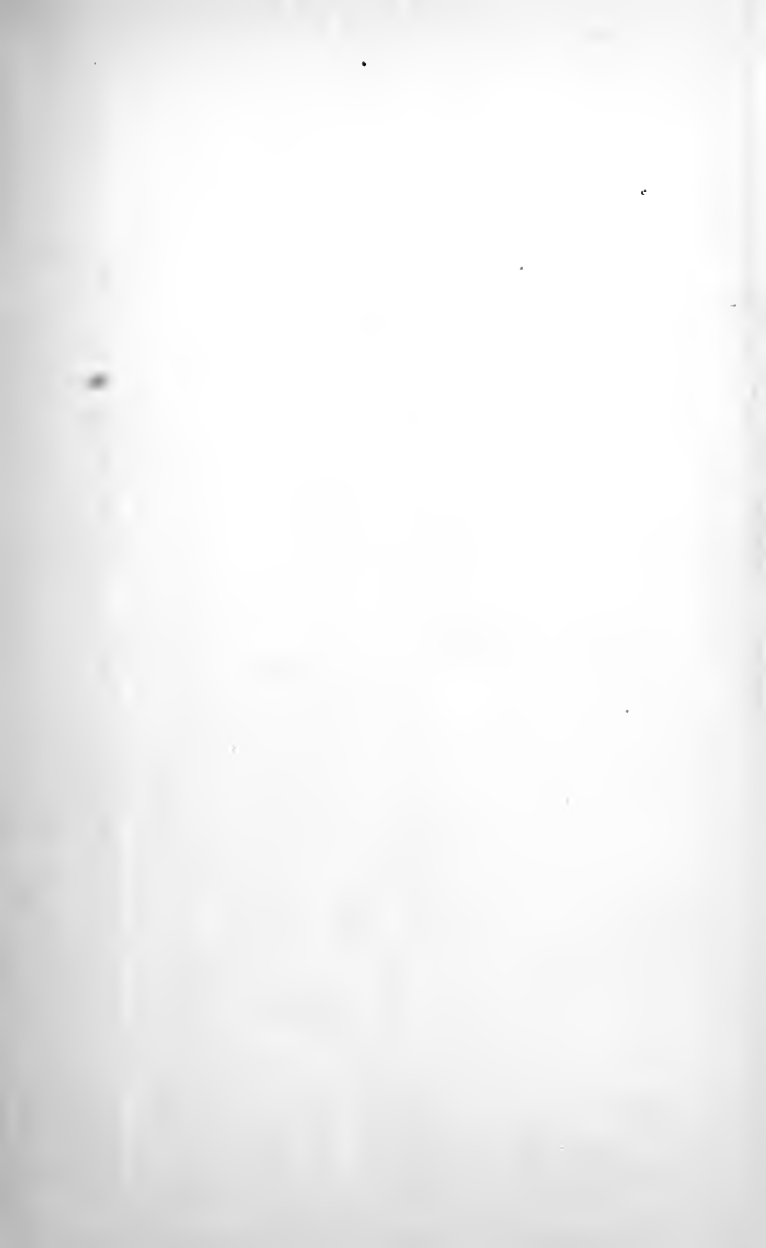
1. City and rural schools compared	52
2. The superintendent's visits and work	53
3. Origin and early duties of the office	54
4. New conceptions of the office	55
5. Efforts to secure assistance	56
6. Efforts to secure voluntary unions	57
7. The real solution	58
8. Making the office a career	59
9. The fault lies with the system	62
10. The system applied to city schools	63
11. Obstacles to reform	64
12. County superintendent stands for the county unit	65
13. The county-unit plan in outline	66
14. Kind of supervisors needed	69
15. Essentials and advantages of the plan	72



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